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"You know how it is. People say, 'Wait a minute, John. I just want to ask you one more question,' " he says genially.

He's been spending much of his time listening since he was elected in December to fill the 48th District seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he's still the new guy.

But he's also getting a chance to talk. After six months in office, Campbell has made a name for himself on a few key issues the budget and immigration, for example. He's joined some powerful existing GOP caucuses and helped form a new one.

An accountant and car dealer from Orange County who divides his sporting loyalties between UCLA and USC, Campbell has come a long way since he almost didn't run for Congress a year ago.

THE ACCIDENTAL CONGRESSMAN?

Back in 2005, Campbell had finished two terms in the state Assembly and was just settling into his position as a state Senator, after winning a four-year term in 2004.

After 17 years in Congress, Rep. Chris Cox was finally nominated by the president for a higher office chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission and speculations began flying about who would replace him.

Within days of Cox's SEC nomination, state Sen. Dick Ackerman declared he'd run, and Campbell endorsed him. Then something happened.

Campbell changed his mind and ran for the seat himself.

And the race wasn't easy.

He faced nine other Republicans in the primary, and in the general election American Independent Party candidate Jim Gilchrist harnessed the public's growing agitation over illegal immigration and threatened to ride it to victory.

Campbell, in turn, had to take a tough stance on immigration. In the end, he won but with just 44% of the vote in an election with overall poor turnout. Of the 405,655 registered voters in the 48th District during the December election, just 11.38% actually voted for the man who now represents them.

THE NEW JOB

Campbell plunged into the job immediately, flying to Washington, D.C., to be sworn in the day after winning the seat Dec. 6. And as he describes it, it's been nonstop work ever since.

"I'm enjoying the job. I've never worked harder in my life, but I've never been more stimulated in my life either," he said Friday during an interview in his Newport Beach district office.

He was in Orange County last week while Congress was in recess, but his trips home are rarely vacations. He travels the district to speak to constituents and attend meetings, and last week he held the first of what's sure to be a long series of fundraisers for his reelection campaign.

Although he did a lot of those things as a state legislator, there have been some changes. He went from being one of 40 senators to one of 400 representatives. His Senate district was bigger, so he doesn't represent quite as many people, but they're higher maintenance.

"We get a lot more correspondence, a lot more letters, a lot more phone calls," he said. "I'm recognized a lot more at the gas station, at the supermarket."

But he loves the work. After making much ado about immigration during his campaign, Campbell dove into the debate on Capitol Hill and wrote an amendment that would cut federal funding to "sanctuary" cities that don't cooperate with federal officials on immigration enforcement.

With his background as an accountant, he's naturally taken to budget and finance issues.

Campbell's involvement in those issues has drawn attention and in some cases, admiration.

"He is a guy who is respected for his ability to understand accounting and budget issues, just like Chris Cox was very well-respected for that same skill, which not everybody has," said Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, who represents the neighboring district that includes Costa Mesa and was elected the same year as Cox.

"When he speaks about budget issues, I listen to him, and so does everybody else."

Rohrabacher said he wasn't happy with a Campbell vote against offshore oil drilling, but "that has been the only disappointment that I can think of."

For fellow California Rep. David Dreier, it's Campbell's work ethic that's impressive. Dreier said people aren't flocking to Campbell for advice, but he's been an important participant in debates.

"He's a very, very well-intentioned guy who wants to work hard," Dreier said. "He has the experience of having served in Sacramento, and I think that has served him very well."

In terms of his rank in the majority party, Campbell is nowhere close to Cox, who was the fifth-ranked House member when he left. But he has been able to deliver, in some cases even more than his predecessor.

Newport Beach officials already have worked with Campbell's office quite a bit, and Assistant City Manager Dave Kiff said they're pleased with the results. A House energy and water appropriations bill passed in late May included \$5 million for the Upper Newport Bay dredging project, which still needs \$19 million over the next few years.

"Granted, we were looking for more than that and we still will be working on the Senate side, but the most we've ever gotten out of the House side is \$2 million," Kiff said.

"That was fairly significant for a brand new legislator to get that kind of money."

But not all the assessments are glowing. Democratic candidate Steve Young, who ran against Campbell in 2005 and will do so again in November, said his opponent campaigned on cutting spending but hasn't followed through.

"I was surprised that our 'deficit hawk' voted for the budget that extended the debt ceiling to \$9.6 trillion and, frankly, busted the budget," Young said. "There was a bunch of stuff in that budget that he said he wasn't going to support."

Campbell said although the proposed federal budget increases spending, revenue is expected to grow faster, so it will actually help lower the deficit. But Young wonders why the debt ceiling

had to be raised if the budget didn't continue to overspend.

"The first budget he gets, he votes for a deficit budget," Young said.

TIME TO ASK SOME QUESTIONS

Numbers aside, Campbell is still growing into his job, which in the heavily Republican 48th District can pretty much be a job for life. He has ambitious plans to curb federal spending and reform the tax system, and he wants to get more involved in foreign policy.

But he will have to accept one step back after the November elections assuming he wins his seat again, which is a pretty solid bet. When new members come in after those elections, Campbell will trade Cox's old office one of the nicer ones for one more befitting his rank.

But he won't be the new guy anymore, and that's good, because seniority dictates things like the seating order at committee tables and who gets to ask questions first.

In hearings, Campbell said, "Often the witness leaves before they even get to me."

Campbell sometimes misses Orange County; the self-described "Californian through and through" almost didn't run for Congress because he knew he'd be away so much.

He said he doesn't want to lose touch with his home or "go beltway," as they call it in Washington so he's trying to keep his connections here.

"One of the biggest things that John has done is to communicate with us back here what's going on in Washington," Orange County GOP Chairman Scott Baugh said. "He's still very engaged with the activist community back in Orange County."